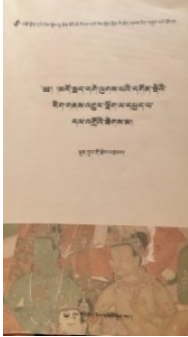


REVIEW: *CULTURAL CHANGES AT AN A MDO DGE LUGS MONASTERY* by Lhun grub rdo rje[†]

Reviewed by Klu thar rgyal ལུ་ཐར་རྒྱལ།



Lhun grub rdo rje ལུ་ཐར་རྒྱལ་དེ། 2018. *Mdo smad dge lugs pa'i dgon sde'i rig gnas 'gyur ldog la dpyad pa dal 'gro'i zegs ma* མདོ་སྐད་དགེ་ལུགས་པའི་དགོན་སྡེའི་རིག་གནས་ རྒྱུར་ཕྱོག་ལ་དཔྱད་པ་དཔལ་འབྱོར་ཟེགས་མ། [*A Study of Cultural Changes at an A mdo Dge lugs Monastery*]. Pe cing བེ་ཅིང་། [Beijing 北京]: Krung ko'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang [Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe] 中国藏学出版社 གུང་ཀོའི་བོད་རིག་པ་དཔལ་སྐྱེལ་ཁང་། [China Tibetology Press]. 252 pages. 38 RMB, paperback.¹

In this eight-chapter study of D+hIH tsha Monastery in A mdo, the author focuses on "cultural" changes. By "cultural," Lhun grub rdo rje refers to management structures, housing, clothing, monks' lives, ritual, food, clothing, the educational system, and the monastery's economy from 1981 to 2016. The advantages and disadvantages of these changes are also discussed and suggestions made on how to minimize the disadvantages.

Chapter One gives the reasons behind conducting this research and suggests that monastery culture is part of larger Tibetan culture. Tibetan researchers' and scholars' familiarity with their own culture may be limiting. In addition, very little study of recent cultural changes in monasteries has been conducted by Chinese researchers, e.g., some who study the topic only introduce the educational system, monks'

[†]Klu thar rgyal. 2019. Review: *Cultural Changes at an A mdo Dge lugs Monastery* by Lhun grub rdo rje. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 58:543-553.

¹ Mtsho sngon dge 'os slob grwa chen mo'i mi rigs dge 'os slob gling gi ched mkhas rig gzhung dpe tshogs [Mtsho sngon Normal University's Nationalities Normal College's Expert Academic Book Collections].

lives, economic realities, the incarnation system, and rituals of certain monasteries. Meanwhile, foreign researchers have provided a few narrowly focused investigations of rules, regulations, structures, monks' lives, the education of monks and nuns, and the monastery economy.¹ The author states that this led him to focus on this topic for his PhD dissertation, with D+hIH tsha Monastery as the monastery of interest. Chapter One also provides a brief introduction to each chapter.

Chapter Two offers a global definition of culture, explains how monastery culture could be understood, and gives a brief history of D+hIH tsha Monastery.² Originally a place for religious retreat, full names of the monastery include D+hIH tsha bkra shis chos sdings gling, and Dpal mi 'gyur dge ldan bkra shis chos sdings. Other versions of the names include Sde tsha, Sdi tsha, Lde tsha, D+hi tsha, and D+hIH tsha. Lhun grub rdo rje used D+hIH tsha.

Why did the author choose this particular monastery? Lhun grub rdo rje states that D+hIH tsha Monastery features both *ri khrod* 'mountain hermitage' and a monastery that no longer solicits donations from farming and herding communities because it is financially independent. He writes that he did not observe such features in other Dge lugs Monasteries he visited in A mdo and D+hIH tsha Monastery's cultural changes had not been studied.

¹ Lhun grub rdo rje states (2018:8) "Goldstein and Jane Caple have studied the economic development of China's monasteries." (See Caple's discussion (2011, 2019) of D+hIH tsha Monastery opening shops, restaurant, a vegetable shop, a book shop, a printer's, a computer room, a tailor shop, a medical clinic, selling longevity pills and *gter bum* 'treasure jars' containing pure/blessed materials, and offering loans at interest.

² D+hIH tsha bkra shis chos sdings, located fifty-four kilometers northwest of Bayan Township Town, Dpa' lung (Hualong) Hui Autonomous County, is separated into upper and lower monasteries. The former, the "new monastery," was founded by the fourth Zhwa dmar dge 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (1852-1912) in 1903. The lower monastery is known as the "old monastery" and was established by the Nang so 'lord' of Lde tsha at the beginning of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Both monasteries are Dge lugs (Nian and Bai 1993:53-55). See Smith (2017:171-172) for a photo of the monastery. For more, see <https://bit.ly/2rnXSJL>, accessed 8 November 2019.

The third chapter introduces the tasks of each of the monastery's administrators. The *khri pa* is the most important monastery leader and has the power to decide which new monks enter the monastery formally. In 2016, the *khri pa* was Sku phyogs sku mched tshang. When a *khri pa* completes his work term, another is chosen based on the needs of the monastery's educational system. The *khri pa's* main responsibility is to annually choose a *bge bskos* whose duty it is to observe how well the monks follow monastery rules. The *khri pa* also selects five to seven monastery administrators every three years who are responsible for choosing *gnyer pa* 'stewards'. These monk workers are also shopkeepers, tailors, teachers in the monastery's primary school, or the monks who work in the photocopy shop. The administrators also serve special guests such as government representatives and famous *bla ma*, and ensure that the monastery's water-taps and roadways are maintained.

Changes in the number of administrators in the last two decades and the reasons for these changes are discussed. The author interviewed former *gnyer pa* and learned that there were four *gnyer pa* in the monastery in 1988. Even though the number of monks continually increased, only four monks were responsible for preparing *mang ja* 'tea and food offered as alms to monks during collective prayer assemblies'. They also needed to solicit tea and food for *mang ja* from designated communities.

In late 1997, *mang ja* was provided using the monastery's resources, except during the winter, thus reducing pressure on the *gnyer pa* to solicit collections. In 2008, the monastery had enough money to support itself from income from the shops, a restaurant, a tailor shop, and a copy shop at the monastery. The monastery then stopped seeking donations from communities.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was one tailor, but now there is a specific shop for the tailors. All the income from the tailors belongs to the monastery. The salaries of the administrators and monk workers vary between 1,000 and 10,000 RMB per year. The monks preferred the higher paid positions.

Chapter Four describes changes in the monks' lives after 1980, the year the monastery reopened. The author focuses on the monks' quarters, food, clothes, and holidays and specifies the changes and reasons for each. For example, most monastery windows were covered with paper in the 1980s. However, in 1996, monks began building glass-enclosed porches that made the rooms warmer and helped dry clothing more quickly. After the monastery had electricity, the monks increasingly chose to cook with electricity. The monks then reduced the number of rooms they had because they no longer needed space to store fuel. In 2015, the monastery built a six-floor-apartment building sponsored by the leader of Zi ling (Xining) City and the local government. Aware of an apartment's advantages, the monks increasingly wanted their own apartment.

In the 1980s, some monks died from eating spoiled dry meat and old dry noodles. The monastery subsequently bought a large refrigerator. Monks were then able to cook using raw meat rather than only dried meat. In 2006, most monks stopped eating meat in the *tshogs chen 'du khang* 'central prayer assembly hall' to reduce the slaughter of animals and reduce food expenses, since vegetables cost less than meat.

In the 1980s, all the monks wore white *smad g.yogs* 'lower garment worn by monks' with a piece of red cloth along the bottom edge, because it was inexpensive. Once life conditions improved after 1990, monks purchased red *smad g.yogs* and no longer wore white *smad g.yogs*.

The monks have several annual holidays. The longest lasts for two months in summer. One holiday coincides with the time of class promotion in the monastery. For example, the day that monks are promoted, they serve *mang ja* to other monks. They also spend time chatting and teasing each other at a nearby stream. However, as living conditions improved, they began to travel and visit other monasteries in Mtsho sngon and Gansu provinces.

Chapter Five discusses changes in education. In 2001, the monastery established a primary school which taught Tibetan, Chinese, English, and Tibetan calligraphy. Later, math was added to better

educate future *gnyer pa*. An example of a change in classroom behavior is that monks used to prostrate to the teachers three times at the beginning and end of classes. This is no longer done by some monks because some teachers asked them not to do so.

In the past, the monks used a *sam Ta* 'traditional Tibetan writing board' that involved lightly covering the surface of a wood board with barley flour to practice Tibetan calligraphy. Later, when they had learned more, ink and paper were used. The *sam Ta* is no longer used.

Chapter Six discusses changes in the monastery economy. In the past, the most difficult monastery tasks were those of the *gnyer pa*, who were responsible for obtaining food for *mang ja* through community solicitations. Monks were generally reluctant to be *gnyer pa*, and there was also an awareness that soliciting from community members caused hardship. In 1987, a shop was opened in the monastery that proved successful. The monastery then opened a second shop, a restaurant, a vegetable shop, a tailor shop, a copy shop, stopped eating meat in the monastery's prayer assembly hall, and began loaning money at interest to locals. As the monastery became independent economically, it no longer relied on community donations.

Chapter Seven discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the changes at the monastery. Not eating meat in the prayer assembly hall reduced monastery expenses, and was considered more "Buddhist." Disadvantages included the use of cell phones, which led monks to spend less time on study. Previously, a common conversation topic for monks centered on those who were outstanding scholars; however, a main topic today is wealthy monks or those with rich sponsors. Overall, the author asserts that most changes to the monastery have more advantages than disadvantages.

At the end of this chapter, the author imagines what may happen in the future; for example, currently about forty monks enter the monastery annually and the same number leave and become laymen. Consequently, the number of monks will probably decline.

The final chapter summarizes the changes and the reasons for these changes. Fundamentally, monk life conditions and the monastery economy have improved. As the financial situation improves, the study of Buddhism declines.

My critique of this book includes the author using the term *glog klad khang* 'computer room', but not explaining until the end of the book that the monks copy texts here. The author also has a tendency to repeat background information.

My experience with Amdo monasteries is that their shop prices are higher than similar shops outside the monastery. The food at monastery restaurants is often double the price of comparable food in other restaurants, either due to the monastery's remote location, inconvenient transportation, or to maximize profit. I wonder if this is the same for D+hIH tsha Monastery and if so, what do individual monks think about this?

Later, the author mentions vehicles owned by D+hIH tsha Monastery. Did the monastery buy them to provide a taxi service for the monks and visitors to and from local towns? I spent several holidays at Klu tshang Monastery¹ in Mang ra (Guinan) County. During my first visit, I took a private taxi that operated between the county town and the monastery. Later, however, the monastery bought a small van to transport monks and guests, which proved popular because the fees were cheap and the van was fast. I was told the monastery's taxi service was profitable.

The author mentioned monks using wood as cooking fuel in the past and then switching to cooking with electricity. How did the monks warm their quarters? Monasteries that I have visited in Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture used livestock dung as

¹ Rnye dgon bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling and Klu tshang dgon bshad sgrub dar rgyas dge 'phel gling are alternative names. This Dge lugs monastery is located in Sum mdo (Senduo) Township, Mang ra County, two kilometers from the county town. The Fourth Rnye, Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1850-1909) founded this monastery in 1889 at the request of four Bdud shul klu ba tribes. Also known as Klu tshang bshad sgrub dge 'phel gling, it sits at the foot of Hamairi Mountain at an elevation of 3,080 meters (Nian and Bai 1993:195). See Smith (2017:77) for a photo of the monastery.

cooking fuel and also to warm their quarters during the winter, but by 2012, coal had largely replaced the use of dung. Today, if D+hIH tsha Monastery does the same, it could be considered a disadvantage due to the strong smell of burning coal masking the odor of smoldering incense in the vicinity of Shing khri¹ and Klu thang monasteries in winter.

Currently, monasteries are confronting the issue of garbage. A monk from Shing khri Monastery told me that in about 1985, people walked barefoot in dense grass around the monastery. Today, however, broken glass and trash are scattered everywhere. How does garbage impact D+hIH tsha Monastery and how does the monastery deal with garbage?

These issues aside, Lhun grub rdo rje's study will interest scholars of contemporary Tibetan monasteries. It contributes to detailed studies of individual monasteries in China, and how Tibetan Buddhist institutions deal with the challenges of change in China. Careful description, well-organized points, photographs, and clear explanations of changes at the monastery allow the reader to quickly grasp the author's ideas.

¹ Located in 'Ba' chu (Bashui) Township in the northeast of 'Ba' (Tongde) County, the elevation is 3,200 meters. The third Rdzong sngon incarnation *bla ma* from Bde chen (Diqian) Monastery established this monastery as a branch monastery of Bde chen Monastery in 1950. Two abbots were invited from the Rnga ba (Aba) area in Sichuan. In 1958, there were seventeen monks, forty-five students, and three *bla ma*. The monastery was closed in the same year. In 1983, it was reopened and an abbot was invited from Sichuan (Nian and Bai 1993:313-314). Smith (2017:85) writes that this Rnying ma monastery's full name is 'Bal shing khri dgon thub bstan bshad sgrub dar rgyas chos 'khor gling and it had 220 monks.

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TIBETAN TERMS

'ba' འབའ།

'ba' chu འབའ་ཚུ།

'bal shing khri dgon thub bstan bshad sgrub dar rgyas chos 'khor

gling འབའ་ཤིང་ཁྱི་དགོན་ཐུབ་བསྟན་བཤད་སྒྲུབ་དར་རྒྱས་ཆོས་འཁོར་གླིང་།

a mdo ཨ་མདོ།

bde chen བདེ་ཆེན།

bdud shul klu ba བདུད་ཤུལ་ལྷ་བ།

bge bskos བག་བསྐོས།

bla ma ལྷ་མ།

blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma ལྷོ་བཟང་ཆོས་ཀྱི་ཉི་མ།

chos thog ཆོས་ཐོག།

d+hi tsha ལྷི་ཚ།

d+hiH tsha ལྷི་ཚ།

d+hiH tsha bkra shis chos sdings gling ལྷི་ཚ་བརྒྱ་ཤིས་ཆོས་སྤིངས་གླིང་།

dge lugs དགེ་ལུགས།

dhi tsha ལྷི་ཚ།

dpa' lung དཔ་ལུང་།

dpal mi 'gyur dge ldan bkra shis chos sdings དཔལ་མི་འཁྱུར་དགེ་ལྷན་བརྒྱ་ཤིས་ཆོས་

སྤིངས།

glog klad khang གློག་ཀླང་ཁང་།

gnyer pa གཉེར་པ།

gter bum གཏེར་བུམ།

gzhung gsar གཞུང་གསར།

khri pa ཁྱི་པ།

klu tshang ལྷ་ཚང་།

klu tshang bshad sgrub dge 'phel gling ལྷ་ཚང་བཤད་སྒྲུབ་དགེ་འཕེལ་གླིང་།

klu tshang dgon bshad sgrub dar rgyas dge 'phel gling ལྷ་ཚང་དགོན་བཤའ་
 ལྷུང་དར་རྒྱས་དགེ་ལེལ་གླིང་།
 lde tsha ལྷེ་ཚ།
 lhun grub rdo rje ལྷུན་གྲུབ་རྩོམ་མེས་།
 mang ja མང་ཇ།
 mang ra མང་ར།
 mkhan po མཁན་པོ།
 mtsho shar མཚོ་ཤར།
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།
 mtsho sngon dge 'os slob grwa chen mo'i mi rigs dge 'os slob gling gi ched
 mkhas rig gzhung dpe tshogs མཚོ་སྒོན་དགེ་འོས་སྒྲོབ་གྲ་ཆེན་མོའི་མི་རིགས་དགེ་འོས་
 ལྷོབ་གླིང་གི་ཆེད་མཁས་པ་རིག་གཞུང་དཔེ་ཚོགས།
 rdzong sngon རྫོང་སྒོན།
 ri khrod རི་ཁྲོད།
 rje zhwa dmar རྩེ་ལྷ་དམར།
 rnga ba རྩ་བ།
 rnye རྩེ།
 rnye dgon bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling རྩེ་དགོན་བཤའ་སྐྱུང་དར་རྒྱས་གླིང་།
 rnying ma རྩིང་མ།
 rtsam pa རུམ་པ།
 sam Ta སམ་ཏ།
 sde tsha སྡེ་ཚ།
 sdi tsha སྡི་ཚ།
 shing khri ཤིང་ཁྲི།
 sku phyogs sku mched tshang ལྷུ་ཕྱོགས་སྐྱུ་མཆེད་ཚང་།
 smad g.yogs ལྷན་གཡོགས།
 sum mdo ལུམ་མདོ།
 tshogs chen 'du khang ཚོགས་ཆེན་འདུ་ཁང་།

zha dmar pa dge 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho ཞ་དམར་པ་དགེ་འདུན་བསྐྱེན་འཛིན་མུ་

མཚོ།
zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།

CHINESE TERMS

Aba 阿坝

Bashui 巴水

Diqian 迪千

Gansu 甘肃

Guinan 贵南

Haidong 海东

Haina 海南

Hamairi 哈买日

Hualong 化隆

Qinghai 青海

Senduo 森多

Sichuan 四川

Tongde 同德

Xining 西宁